

Designing military bases for human security

An alternative design framework for military bases in support of human security

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Abstract

People can achieve security through their actions. Generally, these actions are accomplished by politics, military, law enforcement, and other operational means. Security is also achieved through physical features in the natural and built environment. Throughout the course of human history, architects, designers and (military) engineers, have addressed security of all kinds. At the most fundamental level, the built environment is shaped to provide shelter from natural phenomena such as temperature, precipitation and sun. Beyond these basic needs, building design also encompasses the two distinct, but closely related, issues of safety and security.

The design of buildings and settlements to protect its inhabitants from attack is as old as the history of architecture itself. From macro- to micro-spatial scale, security has always been incorporated in the built environment. From a military perspective, the development of gunpowder and cannons in the Middle Ages forced walls to become higher and thicker in protection against cannon balls. The eventual result was the bastioned fort, which was developed in increasingly elaborate forms. With a broad open space in front of the moats, the drawbridge, inner and outer entries, the high walls with slit openings and the well-guarded towers. The design of military structures to resist artillery fire or bombs is a specialised task that does not normally enter into the design of everyday buildings. However, design for security in the sense of protecting occupants from criminal and violent behaviour is a familiar, if not prominent, aspect of everyday civilian design. What if this civilian design knowledge is incorporated in military design during military operations? Could an alternative design framework be created that supported the human security situation of the local population?

This article argues that Western militaries are very capable in constructing operational infrastructure to carry out, and to sustain, military operations and to protect its occupants (Western soldiers), but the design of these infrastructures neglect aspects that support local human security. In building up this argument, after describing the methodology, first, the definition and meaning of human security is explained; second, military base design is introduced and the lack of architectural awareness for human security in military base design is laid out; third, the current knowledge on civilian design for security is presented; and fourth, a possible alternative framework, based on civilian insights, is provided by which military engineers could incorporate human security aspects in the design of future operational infrastructures. Before elaborating on the points above, key terms are introduced.